



SNOW LEOPARD LODGE

A photograph of a snowy mountain landscape. A trail of dark, distinct paw prints leads from the bottom left towards the center of the frame. The snow is deep and uneven, with some rocks partially visible. In the background, there are bare, dark trees and shrubs. The overall scene is quiet and wintry.

Snow Leopard Lodge

11 days- 10 nights



Tucked away in a high remote corner of the Western Himalayas, wedged between Tibet and Central Asia, is the evocatively named district of Ladakh–Land of (high) Passes. Bounded by two of the world's mightiest mountain ranges, the Karakoram in the north and the Great Himalaya in the south, it is traversed by two other parallel chains, the Ladakh Range and the Zaskar Range.

Once a powerful independent kingdom encompassing much of present day Western Tibet, Ladakh lay on one of the many important subsidiary routes of the Silk Road connecting the important Central Asian trading posts of Kashgar and Yarkhand with Northern India. The capital Leh was itself a substantial trading town, where silks and brocades, tea, salt, fine wool and other items were bought and sold. Despite the advent of the globalised age and the presence of an enormous military base, the Leh bazaar – dominated by the enormous old palace – retains a flavour of its old trading roots. There's a cheerful bustling atmosphere about the place, a surprising range of goods many of which are suitably exotic and that immediately apparent ethnic mix of people and costumes that you would expect of a trading town perched at 11000 feet at the cusp of High Asia.



Ladakh is Buddhist country with prayer flags fluttering brightly in the wind and long 'Mani walls' covered in exquisitely carved prayer stones, stupas and chortens and large and small Buddhist monasteries called gompas, to be found everywhere. Indeed, one of the most attractive aspects of this region is the contrast between the stone-hard people and the gentle and cheerful Buddhism that they practice.



But it is the landscape that overwhelms visitors – high, jagged mountains painted in subtle pastel shades dropping down to vivid emerald fields of barley and apple and apricot orchards and water meadows under startlingly blue skies. Every turn of the road, every twist of a walking trail opens exhilarating vistas of mountain and valley; of fissured crags choked with wild rose and crystal streams lined with willows. And it is hugely varied as well – with the high plains of the Changthang supporting herds of wild ass, antelope and even wild yaks with wolves and snow leopards to the Tso Kar and Tso Moriri to the high altitude passes such as Khardung la and Taglang La. This range of habitat supports a commensurate diversity of birds and mammals. In an increasingly nondescript and undifferentiated globe, Ladakh remains a fragment of a world where every region was once unique and distinctive.



SNOW LEOPARD LODGE, ULLEY

The Snow Leopard Lodge is located in the village of Ulley in West Ladakh, north of the Indus River, at the head of the valley of the Ulley Chhu at an altitude of about 13,000 feet. It is 2 - 3 hours driving time from Leh. Ulley itself is a hamlet of just about 7 houses beyond which are the high summer pastures of Yak and Dzo. This is excellent Ibex country and there are few more evocative sights than a magnificently horned male Ibex standing vigil on some impossibly narrow outcropping, a few thousand feet over a plunging cliff. This is an area that has only recently been developed for Snow Leopard tracking and has quickly gained a reputation not just for the high numbers of snow leopards but as one of the best areas to see Ibex, Urial, Wolf, Himalayan fox, Bearded and Himalayan griffon vultures and golden eagles.

The Snow Leopard Lodge is the only dedicated wildlife lodge in Ladakh. It began originally as a homestay under the auspices of a program initiated by the Snow Leopard Conservancy designed to use tourism as a conservation tool for the preservation of snow leopards and their ecosystem by putting tourism revenue directly into local community.

The Lodge commands excellent views down the valley and the high mountains surrounding it and you are certain to see Ibex from here and if you are lucky much other wildlife including Wolf, Himalayan Fox and perhaps even Snow Leopard.



SNOW LEOPARD LODGE, ULLEY



The Team



SNOW LEOPARD LODGE, ULLEY

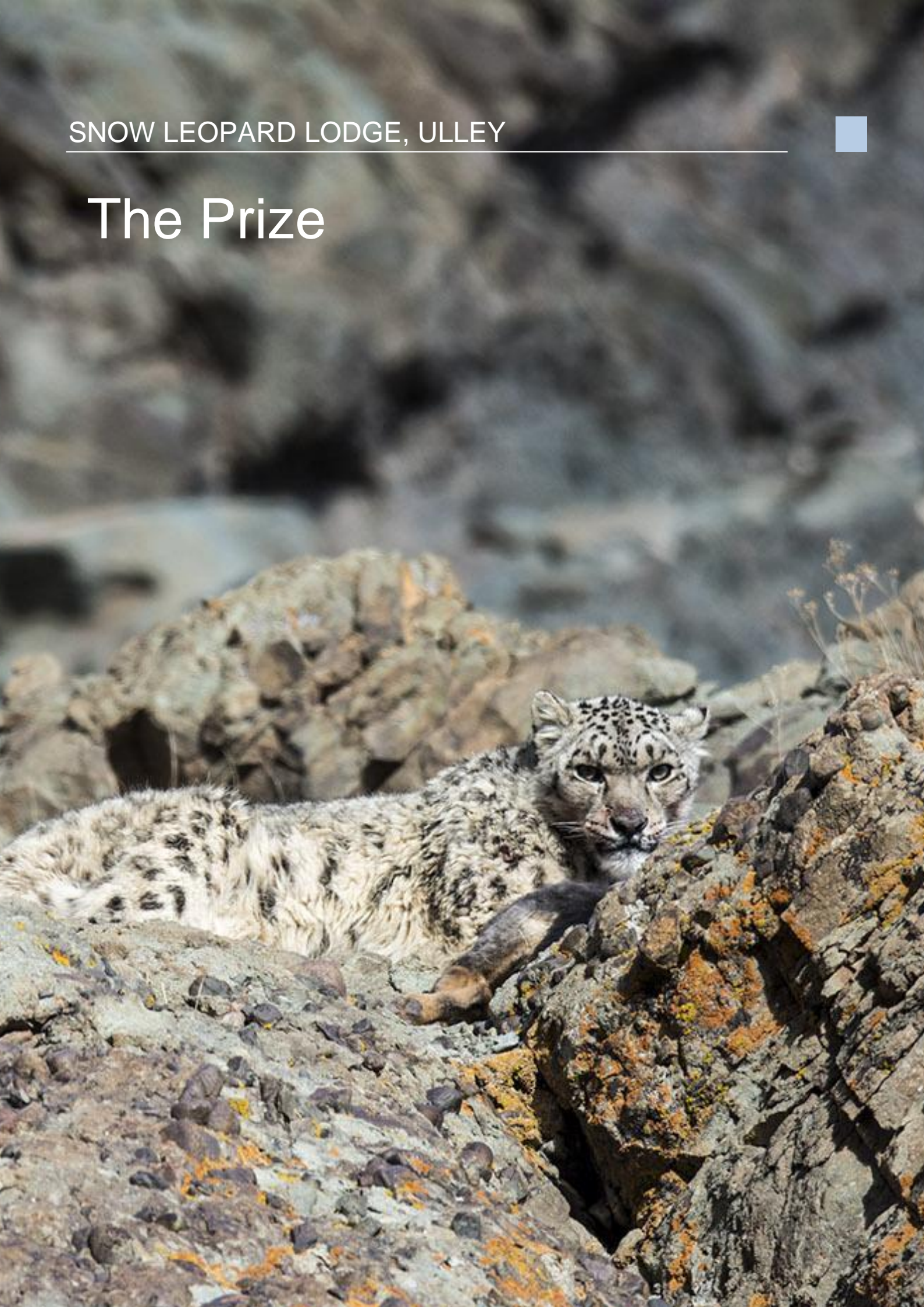
The Quest




SNOW LEOPARD LODGE, ULLEY



The Prize



The image shows a vast night sky filled with numerous stars of varying brightness. The stars are scattered across the dark expanse, with some appearing as sharp points of light and others as slightly larger, softer discs. At the bottom of the image, there is a dark, silhouetted mountain range with jagged peaks and ridges, suggesting a high-altitude observation site. The overall scene is serene and captures the beauty of a clear night sky.

The Plan – From Leh to Leh

ABBREVIATED ITINERARY

Day 1 - Arrive at Leh and transfer to the Grand Dragon Hotel. Day at leisure.

Day 2- Drive into the Ladakh landscape towards Taglang La Pass and villages of Gya, Lhato and Meru. Visit the Monastery at Thikse enroute. Overnight at Grand Dragon Hotel.

Day 3 - Check out and drive west towards Ulley Village and Snow Leopard Lodge. Checkin to Snow Leopard Lodge.

Day 3 - Day 9 – Explore the wilderness of Ladakh from Snow Leopard Lodge. Over the next few days you explore the area on foot and SUV's with our team of trackers at the lodge, tracking the snow leopard.

Day 10 – Check out post breakfast. Drive back to Leh stopping to visit Alchi Gompa on the way. Overnight at Grand Dragon Hotel.

Day 11 – Check out post breakfast and transfer to Leh Airport for flight back to Delhi.

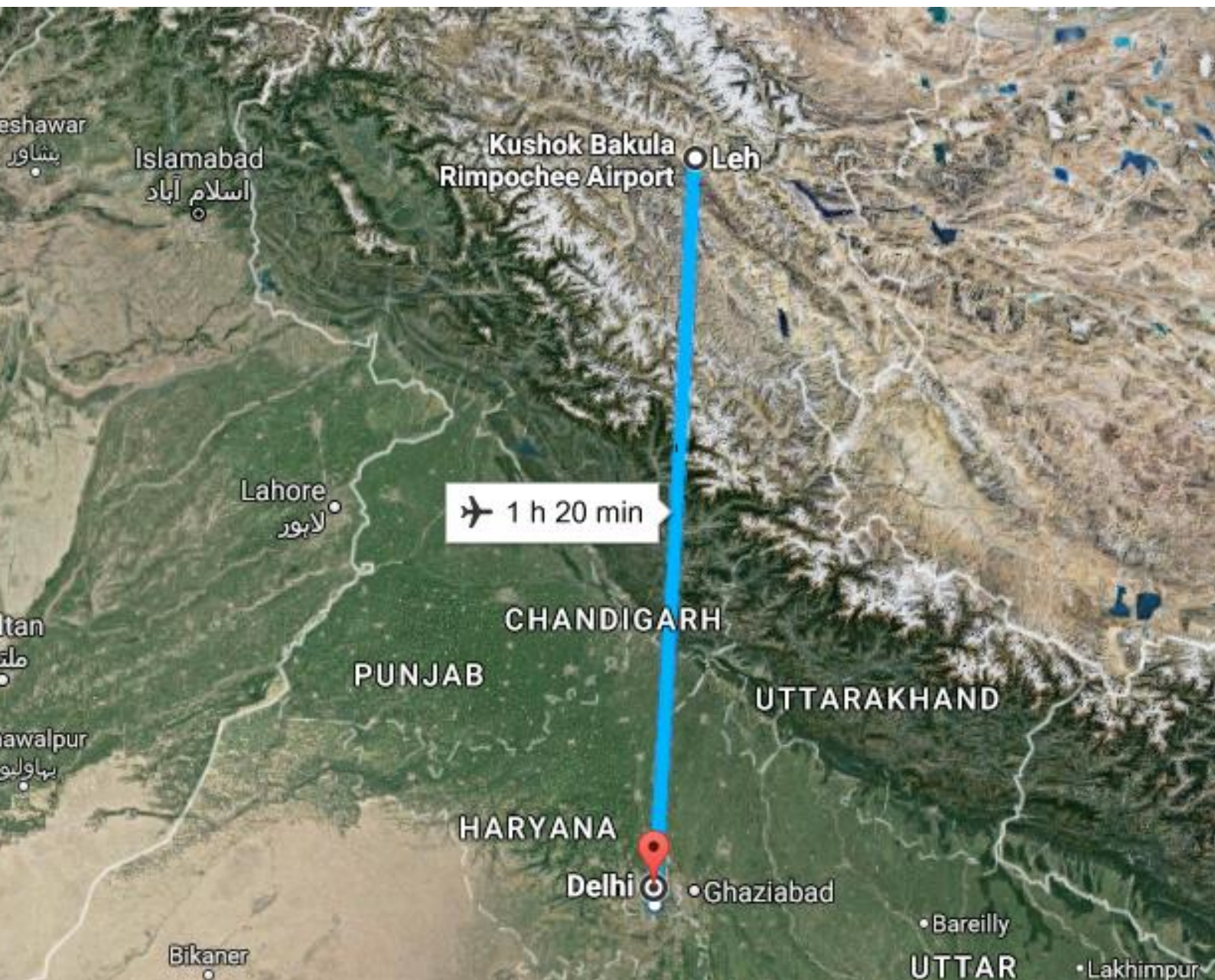


DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 1

Upon Arrival at Leh Airport you are met and transferred to your hotel. Rest of the day is at leisure to acclimatize to the high altitude and rarefied air. Leh is at 11400 feet and the flight up from the plains means that you have to acclimatize gently without pushing yourself. The 2 ½ days scheduled here is the minimum required as you will be going to a higher altitude and will be doing a fair amount of walking. At some point over the next few days in Leh, meet with staff from the Snow Leopard Conservancy for a briefing on the history of snow leopard conservation in Ladakh with insight given into the current threats to snow leopards and the strategy adopted to combat these threats

Overnight at Grand Dragon Hotel. Full Board



DETAILED ITINERARY

GRAND DRAGON HOTEL

The Grand Dragon is the perfect candidate for everyone setting foot for the first time into Ladakh, both in terms of the comforts necessary to acclimatize to the altitude of Ladakh and also in lieu of its central location in the capitol of Leh.

Established in the year 2007, The Grand Dragon Ladakh, one of the first luxury hotels in Ladakh, is owned and operated by the Abdu family from Leh, who have more than 40 years of experience welcoming visitors to the beautiful region. It is decorated magnificently with handmade paintings by Gulam Mustafa (First modern Artist of Ladakh) around every corner, and fixtures that are reminiscent of royalty.



DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 2

Today you set out for an extraordinary drive East heading towards Taglang La and the villages of Gya, Lhato and Meru. It's a fantastic drive taking you away from the valley of the Indus up a subsidiary valley to an extraordinary area even by Ladakhi standards that marks the line where the Indian mainland collided with and drove under Asian land mass. There is some dramatic scenery here and you have a chance of sighting wildlife including Blue sheep, Golden eagles and Bearded vultures. Rafts of Red-billed Choughs perform synchronized aerobatics and in the fallow fields you have the chance of seeing the very beautiful Tibetan Partridge and the more common Chukor partridge.

Overnight at Grand Dragon Hotel. Full Board.



DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 3

Drive west today on the road to Kargil and Srinagar, generally following the Indus River. You pass through the small town of Nimmoo – one of the most important in Ladakh, where the Zaskar river meets the Indus. After a little over an hour you head north on a road marked to Likir – one of Ladakh's famous Buddhist monasteries. This is all snow leopard country. The landscape here is even bigger, more expansive and open, until you turn off onto a dirt road, winding up a narrow valley, following a stream called the Ulley Chhu. Smaller valleys intersect and the guides have their heads craned all the time, scanning the hill sides and the skyline for any silhouette. This is excellent Ibex country and there are few more evocative sights than a magnificently horned male Ibex standing vigil on some impossibly narrow outcropping, a few thousand feet over a plunging cliff.

Ulley village, west of Leh is an area that is only recently being developed for Snow Leopard watching.

07 nights – Snow Leopard Lodge. Full Board.



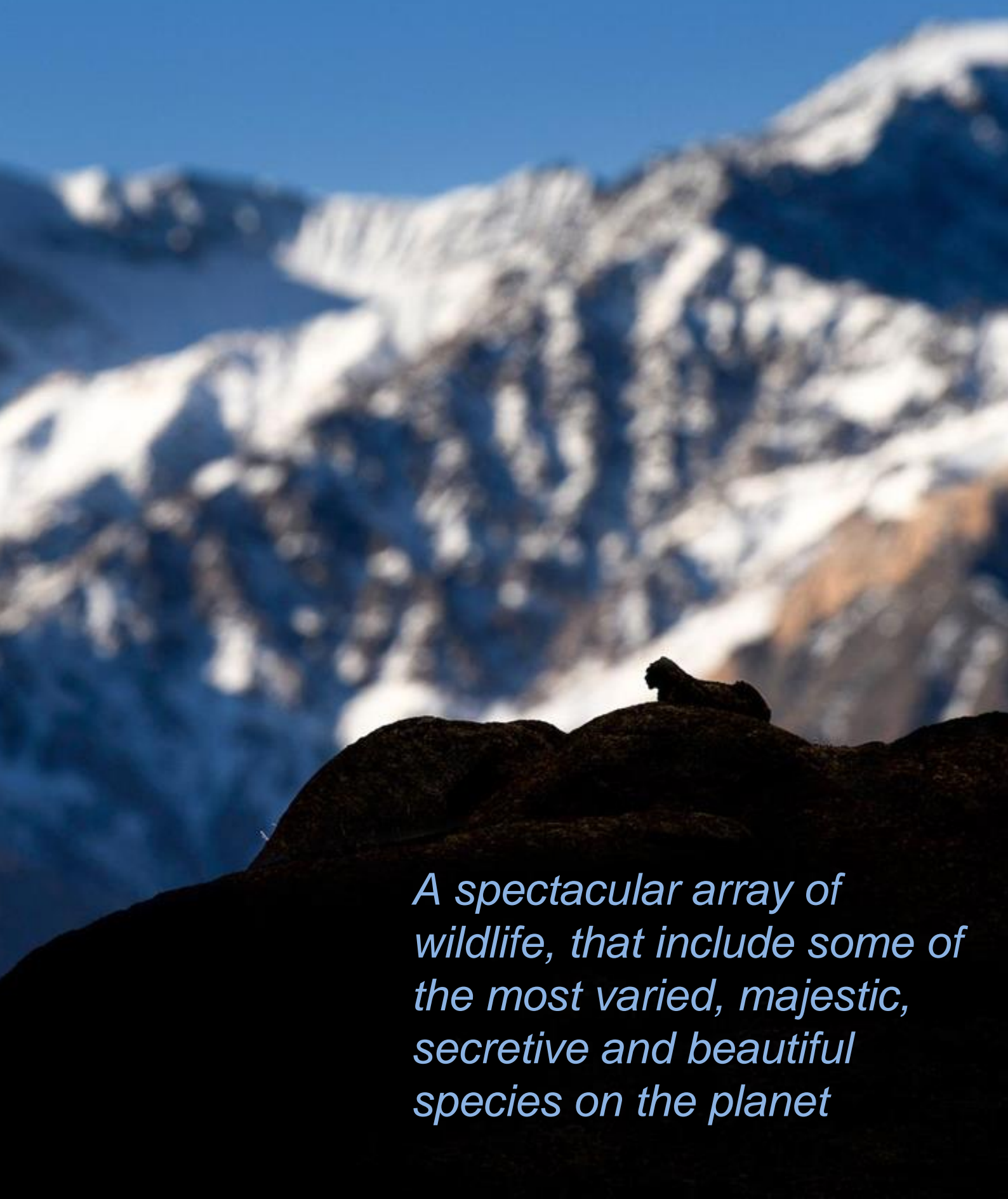
DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 3 – DAY 9 – SNOW LEOPARD LODGE



DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 3 – DAY 9 – SNOW LEOPARD LODGE



*A spectacular array of
wildlife, that include some of
the most varied, majestic,
secretive and beautiful
species on the planet*

DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 3 – DAY 9 – SNOW LEOPARD LODGE

You will be staying in our home stay – which apart from being more comfortable than camping out in sub-zero temperatures – puts money directly into local hands and strengthens the constituency of the snow leopard. This will be your base for the next week.

The Lodge consists of 10 bedrooms, built separately from the main house with a dining room and kitchen – all in the same low stone built building. For our clients, we bring in our own cook and camp staff with an assortment of important luxuries like extra gas heaters, warm shower (and bathroom!), long drop toilet but with a comfortable thunder box, comfortable mattresses, linen, an assortment of coffees, teas, snacks etc. that go a long way to alleviate the cold and the altitude. Add to this the interest of living with a Ladakhi family in the depths of winter and understanding their life-style and you have a very special experience in store - especially sharing the large and warm kitchens that are the heart of a Ladakhi home in winter and resplendent with brass, copper and silver ornaments.

From the house and its terraced fields you command a superb view across the valley and are almost certain to see Ibex from here and if you are lucky much other wildlife including wolf, Himalayan fox and perhaps even snow leopard.



DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 4 – DAY 9– SNOW LEOPARD LODGE



TWO TYPES OF DINING AT THE SNOW LEOPARD LODGE



DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 4 – DAY 9 – SNOW LEOPARD LODGE

Settle in on arrival and acclimatize to the higher altitude of Ulley. You will be based here over 7 nights and the advantage of Ulley is that it is relatively free of tourism and the chaos that has enveloped the some other popular areas. The other advantage is that from here you explore 3 valleys, which, apart from snow leopards, are great for finding urial, Ibex, wolf and Himalayan fox.

Over the next few days you explore the area on foot and SUV's with our spotters tracking the snow leopard. You will be amazed at the sheer dedication and commitment they bring to this trade and the effort they take to ensure that the guests leave happy. They interact closely with the local people and use the network of local intelligence to narrow down the likely sites. In the process there will also be plenty of opportunity for you to get insights into local folklore, as well as learn about local customs and traditions.



DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 4 – DAY 9 – SNOW LEOPARD LODGE





DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 10

After another morning out, we say our goodbyes to our host after lunch and drive back to Leh town. Enroute we visit the Alchi monastery if time permits (the morning can drag longer if there is good wildlife movement). Alchi Gompa is one of the oldest monasteries dating back to the 11th century. It is the only low land monastery in the region as it was built in a time of peace, before the marauding armies forced the monasteries to take shelter amongst the slopes and gorges.

Overnight at Grand Dragon Hotel. Full Board



DAY 11

This morning, you will check out of your hotel after breakfast and then transferred to the airport for your flight to Delhi.

THE END OF THE EXPEDITION



